

Iowa DNR has plan to dispose of dead animals in FMD outbreak

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EMMETSBURG, Iowa -- When Iowa officials began looking at how to handle a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources was asked to write a plan for disposing of euthanized animals based on the worst-case scenario.

"We decided that we could always scale back," said Kathy Lee, environmental specialist senior with the DNR. "We have since used the plan several times when we have had mass animal fatalities, and it worked very well."

The DNR developed geographical information system carcass disposal maps based on existing rules and laws. The maps are available on the DNR Web site.

"Site conditions must be field verified by DNR staff before burying can start," Lee said.

The DNR plan considers environmental concerns such as proximity to water, soils and geology. The plan also takes into account where towns, farmsteads and roads are located and considers disease transmission.

When burial is carried out, there must be 50 feet between trenches, which must be two feet above ground water. Trenches must be covered with 2.5 to 3 feet of cover. The rumen or stomach of animals must be punctured to avoid a build up of gas.

In some cases burial may require the taking of land, Lee said. If required, landowners would be compensated.

"One thing you can see by looking at the map of suitable burial sites is that we would run out of land pretty quick if there was a foot and mouth disease outbreak," Lee said.



Research by Iowa State University ag engineer Tom Glanville showed that composting is effective for disposing of euthanized animals. He looked at composting whole animals in windrows with no turning. Animals were totally composted in nine months. Lee said they have used Glanville's composting plan for two situations where a large number of animals died due to disasters, and it worked well.

"If you put down 18 to 20 inches of composting material, two to three feet of material on top of the animal and keep it moist, it works well," Lee said.

The DNR plan calls for teams to dig burial trenches before euthanizing begins so that animals are in piles for no more than a couple of hours.

"Iowa will not burn animals like they did in Great Britain," Lee said. "Given the number of animals, we'd quickly run out of fuel. Animals are mostly water and hard to burn. Burning that many animals would create an air quality emergency for everyone in the state. Burning may have spread the disease in Great Britain."

Once the animals are buried, decontamination will occur. Lee said the DNR recommends using Virkon S and citric acid. Both are mild on the environment.

"We tell producers that they need to make reasonable efforts to contain decontamination water," Lee said.

Biologists would survey the wildlife population in quarantined areas to determine what steps would be taken with regards to selective depopulation.